

PAVING THE PATH TO SUCCESS

A SNAPSHOT OF CAREER AND COLLEGE COUNSELING IN INDIA

About NACAC

[NACAC](#), founded in 1937, is an organization of nearly 14,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education. NACAC is committed to maintaining high standards that foster ethical and social responsibility among those involved in the transition process, as outlined in the association's [Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission](#). The organization regularly conducts research on the state of college admission in the United States, including the Admission Trends Survey (ATS) and the Counseling Trends Survey (CTS). For this research brief, NACAC's annual CTS was modified for the Indian context.

About IC3 Institute

The [IC3 \(International Career & College Counseling\) Institute](#) is a mission-driven nonprofit that brings together high schools, colleges and universities, and industry to ensure early access to career and college counseling, paving the path for students' college readiness, workforce preparedness, and career success. The Institute also serves as a think tank and thought leader on global higher education and career readiness through convenings of experts and timely research. The Institute aims to impact 176,000 high schools over the next 15 years.

Introduction

India is home to the world's largest youth population and has one of the largest student enrollments globally in high school and postsecondary education. Yet it is estimated that by 2030, more than half the world's youth in low- and middle-income nations will leave school without the skills needed for the modern workforce. Roughly 260 million of those underprepared individuals are projected to reside in India, creating significant negative implications for colleges, universities, and industry.

A key reason for this global crisis is the lack of timely and adequate guidance and counseling that students receive in high school about career paths and higher education options. Due to an overall lack of resources, many Indian schools are unable to dedicate personnel, space, and technology infrastructure toward college and career counseling. Additionally, there is an acute lack of trained professionals in the field, a gap that further compounds the overall problem. India has only 100,000 trained career counselors, based on estimates by International Career and College Counseling (IC3). However, 1.5 million counselors would be needed to provide an adequate student-to-counselor ratio for India's 315 million students¹.

Recent research also points to the need for adequate college and career counseling in Indian schools. A 2017 IC3 survey of 112 high school counselors and 1,330 students found that 70 percent of counselors felt that parents and students were highly stressed about career-related decisions. In the same survey, 68 percent of student respondents indicated that establishing a dedicated career counseling office was the most important action their schools could take to help inform decision-making about higher education. Further, the recent [2020 IC3 Institute Student Quest](#) survey of high school students in India and Nepal reveals that while students find career counseling and guidance valuable, both the amount of counseling and the intensity of counseling by grade level are inadequate.

The Current Survey

Building upon existing research, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the IC3 Institute worked together to develop a first-of-its-kind survey of high schools in India. While it is clear that there is a significant need for enhanced career and college counseling in Indian high schools, not enough is known about the current status of the profession and the availability of counselors across schools. Strengthening career and college counseling in Indian schools is even more critical now, given the ongoing disruptions caused by COVID-19 within

¹ The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) recommends a maximum student-to-counselor ratio of 250-to-1. www.schoolcounselor.org.



National Association for
College Admission Counseling



IC³ INSTITUTE

schools and the workforce. India has also just released a new National Education Policy that emphasizes the alignment of academics with vocational education and careers.

The joint NACAC-IC3 Institute survey was designed to ascertain the current status of counseling in India’s schools and to establish a baseline for understanding growth in the profession. The survey, sent in May 2020, primarily targeted the 4,500+ Indian schools included in the IC3 network, with most schools affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), a national board of education in India for public and private schools.

“I think career and college counseling is the need of the hour and we need to develop better counseling in schools.”

– Survey respondent

The analysis is based on responses from 465 professionals who completed at least one substantive question. We recognize that the schools and their counselors represented in this survey are those with easy access to technology, and that the survey might not represent schools in the most underserved parts of India. Further, our survey is not intended to be fully representative of the large and diverse secondary school sector in India, which includes thousands of schools. The survey was instead intended to be a first-ever effort to map the career and college counseling profession in India and thus provide a snapshot of the field. The findings of the survey should be interpreted with this in mind. Details of the methodology can be found at the end of this report.

Survey Results

Prevalence of School Counselors

As the counseling profession gains traction in India, the results of this survey establish a baseline for the prevalence of school counselors in Indian high schools. Overall, just over 80 percent of all schools responding indicated that they employ at least one counselor.

The prevalence of school counselors was analyzed by enrollment size, board affiliate, and city tier—a classification of various Indian cities based on urbanicity and other factors.² Eight of India’s major metropolitan cities fall within tier 1, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad.

School counselors were most common in tier 1 cities, followed by tier 2, and tier 3, where school counselors were present in 87 percent, 78 percent, and 68 percent of schools, respectively.

Percentage of Schools Employing at Least One Counselor

	Percent
All Survey Respondents	80.5
By City Tier	
Tier 1	86.6
Tier 2	77.8
Tier 3	68.4
By Enrollment Size (class IX-XII)	
0-400	74.1
401-800	91.8
801-1,200	92.7
1,201+	100.0

	Percent
All Survey Respondents	80.5
By Board Affiliation	
Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)	77.6
Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE)	71.4
State Boards	53.8
International Baccalaureate (IB)	95.2
International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)	80.0

Note: N=437

² For more information on Indian city tiers: <https://doe.gov.in/sites/default/files/21-07-2015.pdf>

According to survey results, most counselors work in-house as part of the school staff. More than 70 percent of all counselors were employed full-time, in-house, and another 17 percent were in-house but employed part-time.

Total Number of Counselors in Responding Schools, by Employment Status

	Total Number of Counselors	Percent
Full-time, in-house counselors	634	72.2
Part-time, in-house counselors	153	17.4
Full-time, outsourced counselors	43	4.9
Part-time, outsourced counselors	48	5.5

Note: N=410

The proportion of counselors who were employed full-time, in-house, varied based on both the school type and city tier. For example, more than half of full-time, in-house counselors (54 percent) worked in tier 1 city schools, while 32 percent worked in tier 2 cities, and only 14 percent worked in tier 3 cities. Almost two-thirds (61 percent) of full-time, in-house counselors worked at private unaided schools,³ however this might also be a function of the schools that were included in the survey.

Employment Status of Counselors in Responding Schools, by City Tier and School Type

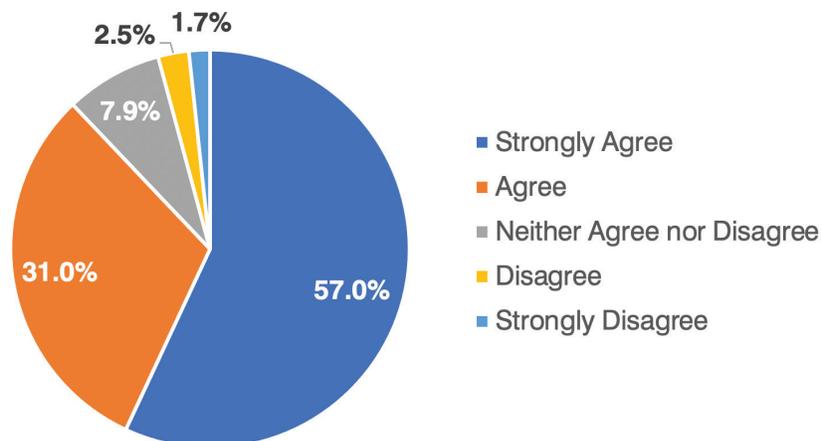
	Full-time, in-house counselors	Part-time, in-house counselors	Full-time, outsourced counselors	Part-time, outsourced counselors
By City Tier				
Tier 1	53.9	52.5	45.2	50.0
Tier 2	32.2	33.8	35.5	36.1
Tier 3	13.9	13.8	19.4	13.9
By School Type				
Private Aided	16.6	8.8	12.9	19.4
Private Unaided	61.4	57.5	67.7	66.7
International	20.0	30.0	19.4	8.3
Other	2.0	3.8	0.0	5.6

Note: N=410

Support for the School Counseling Function

Counselors and teachers who responded to the survey were asked to indicate whether the administration at their schools valued the role counselors play in supporting students. A large majority of both counselors (88 percent) and teachers (92 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that the administration at their schools perceived the need for career and college counseling.⁴

Counselors' Level of Agreement that Their Schools' Administration Perceives the Need for Career and College Counseling



Note: N=397. No significant differences were found in counselors' views based on school characteristics.

³ Private unaided schools are owned by the private sector (individuals, trusts, or societies) and support themselves most commonly through student fees. For more information on school ownership and management in India: <https://www.britishcouncil.in/programmes/schools/overview-school-education-system>

⁴ No significant difference was found between the views of counselors and teachers.

All respondents, including principals and administrative staff, were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed that their school provides a supportive culture for career and college counseling/exploration. Overall, 71 percent either strongly agreed (43 percent) or agreed (28 percent) that the school provided a supportive culture. Although there was overall agreement, there was some variation based on school characteristics. Respondents at international schools were most likely to strongly agree that their schools provided a supportive culture, and schools with higher student-to-counselor ratios tended to show somewhat less agreement.

Survey Respondents' Level of Agreement that Their School Provides a Supportive Culture for Counseling

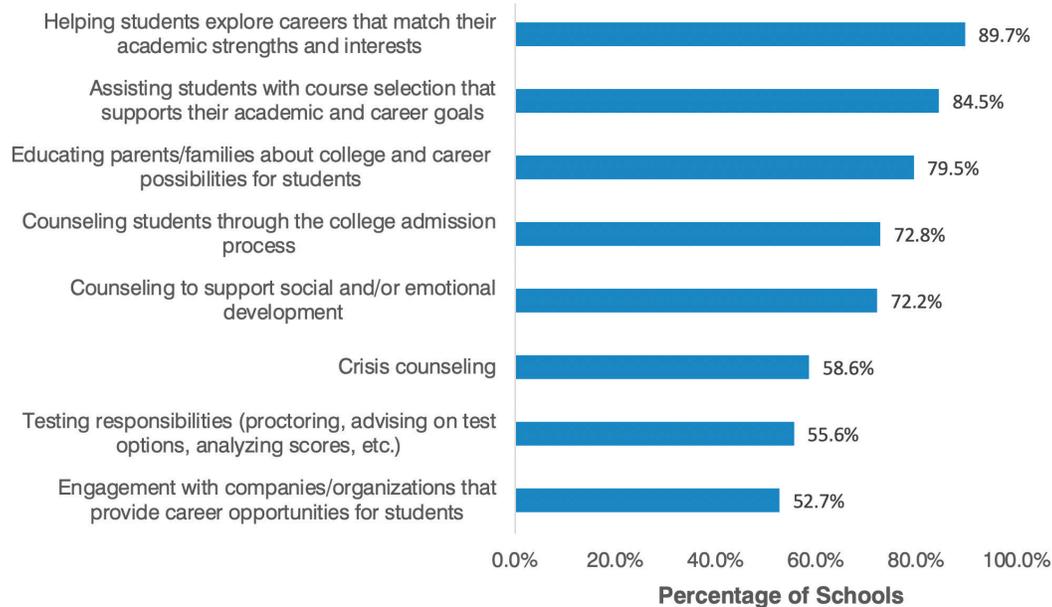
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Survey Respondents	42.6%	27.8%	6.2%	2.0%	0.8%
By School Type					
Private Aided	46.3	38.8	10.4	0.0	4.5
Private Unaided	52.0	37.0	8.1	2.4	0.4
International	68.5	23.3	2.7	5.5	0.0
Other	36.4	45.5	18.2	0.0	0.0
By Students Per Counselor					
0-100	69.3	22.6	8.5	0.0	0.0
101-200	59.8	32.2	3.4	4.6	0.0
201-500	50.0	41.1	7.8	0.0	1.1
501+	36.4	48.5	9.1	3.0	3.0

Note: N=316

Responsibilities of the Counseling Function in Schools

Survey respondents who indicated that their schools employ one or more counselors were asked to identify the various responsibilities that were part of the counseling position at their schools. Results indicate most schools include the following functions within the counselor role, although crisis counseling, testing, and engaging with career opportunity providers are less common than others.

Counselor Responsibilities



Note: N=331

Some notable differences in counselor responsibilities were found based on school characteristics. For example, schools in tier 1 cities were more likely than others to incorporate each of the counseling functions below, with the exception of support for social/emotional development, which was more common at tier 2 and tier 3 city schools.

Counselor Responsibilities by School Type and Location

	Helping students explore careers that match their academic strengths and interests	Assisting students with course selection that supports their academic and career goals	Educating parents/families about college and career possibilities for students	Counseling students through the college admission process	Counseling to support social and/or emotional development	Testing responsibilities (proctoring, advising on test options, analyzing scores, etc.)	Engagement with companies/organizations that provide career opportunities for students
All Survey Respondents	89.7%	84.5%	79.5%	72.8%	72.2%	55.6%	52.7%
by City Tier							
Tier 1	93.8	88.6	85.2	84.1	67.0	58.0	62.9
Tier 2	84.0	81.9	76.4	66.0	77.4	58.5	43.4
Tier 3	87.8	75.5	65.3	46.9	79.6	40.8	36.7
by School Type							
Private Aided	78.4	72.0	68.6	60.8	78.4	60.8	37.5
Private Unaided	91.3	84.5	76.7	69.9	75.7	51.9	49.0
International	95.5	93.9	97.0	93.9	57.6	66.7	52.4
Other	75.0	87.5	75.0	72.8	62.5	25.0	58.5

Note: N=331. Shaded cells indicate that no significant differences were found.

Survey respondents whose schools did not employ any counselors were asked to indicate whether various counseling functions were performed by other school personnel. For each counseling function, teachers were the most likely to fill the role, followed by principals.

Staff Who Fill the Role of Various Counseling Functions at Schools with No Counselors

	Teacher	Principal	Librarian	Administrative Staff
Crisis counseling	72.4%	55.3%	7.9%	21.1%
Counseling to support social and/or emotional development	85.5	50.0	6.7	12.3
Helping students explore careers that match their academic strengths and weaknesses	81.8	40.3	3.9	14.3
Assisting students with course selection that supports their academic and career goals	90.8	36.8	2.6	13.2
Counseling students through the college admission process	76.9	32.2	3.1	21.5
Educating parents/families about college and career possibilities for students	70.0	47.1	2.9	22.9
Engagement with companies/organizations that provide career opportunities for students	50.0	47.1	2.9	33.8
Testing responsibilities (proctoring, advising on test options, analyzing scores, etc.)	67.7	32.3	4.4	25.0

Note: N=77. Only respondents whose schools did not employ counselors were asked this question.

According to survey results, 72 percent of schools tracked their students' college enrollment and/or employment after completion of class XII (grade 12), though this was a less common practice at schools in tier 3 cities.

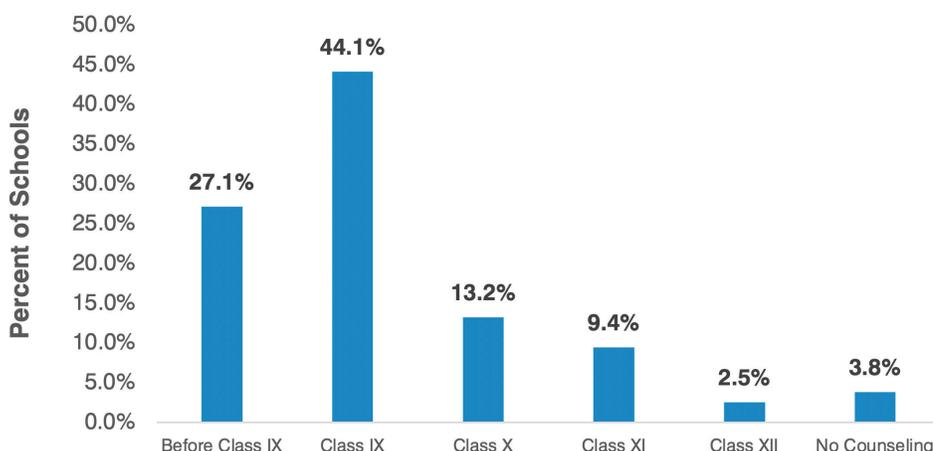
Schools Tracking College Enrollment or Employment Status after Class XII

	Percent
All Survey Respondents	71.9
City Tier	
Tier 1	76.8
Tier 2	70.6
Tier 3	60.3

Note: N=392

Most survey respondents indicated that career and college counseling start in either class IX (grade nine, 44 percent) or earlier (27 percent). Only about 4 percent indicated that no counseling is offered within the school.

When Career and College Counseling Begins

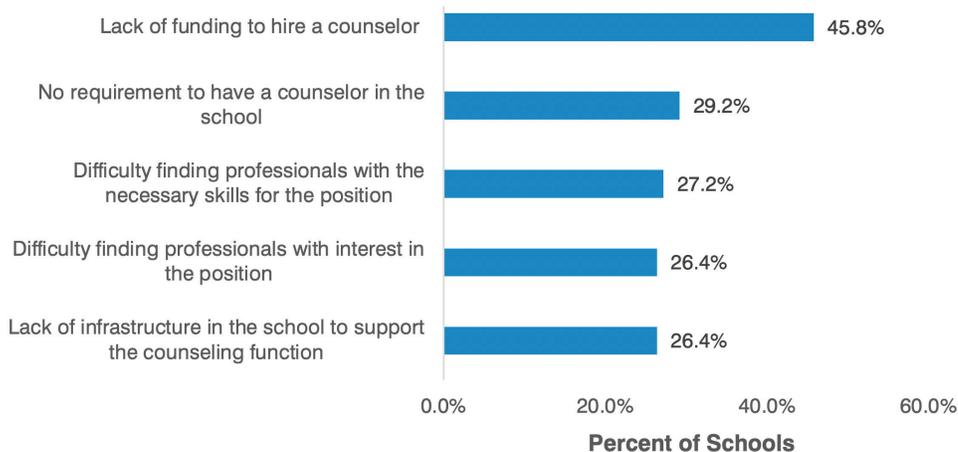


Note: N=395

Barriers to Implementing Counseling

The 4 percent of survey respondents who indicated that their schools provided no counseling were asked to identify the barriers that hindered the adoption of school counseling. Lack of funding, which was reported by 46 percent of schools with no counseling, was by far the most common barrier. Just over 26 percent indicated lack of infrastructure—including dedicated space, technology, and materials—as a problem, with interesting differences based on school type. More than half of private, aided schools cited infrastructure issues, compared with only 13 percent of international schools.

Barriers for Schools Without Any Counseling Function



Note: N=72. Only schools with no counseling function were asked to respond to this question.

The responses to an open-ended comment request revealed the following common themes about barriers.⁵

- Lack of awareness of the counseling field
- Lack of real interest from school administration
- Management is too busy with other aspects of the school
- Parents want private counseling involved instead of school counseling
- Very few college/career options in our location

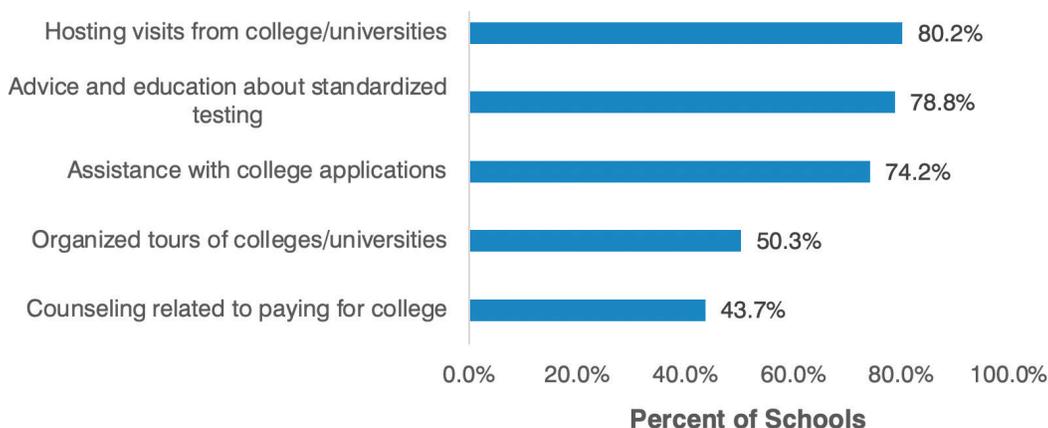
Counseling Activities and Services

Respondents from schools that had a counseling function (regardless of which personnel filled the role) were asked a series of questions to learn more about the prevalence of various activities and services related to both college and career counseling.

College Counseling Services

Three college counseling services—assistance with college applications, advice and education about standardized testing, and hosting visits from colleges/universities—were provided by a large majority of schools, either by counselors or other school personnel.

College Counseling Activities and Services



Note: N=370

A look at differences by school type revealed that schools located in tier 3 cities were least likely to provide each of the following college counseling activities or services.

Counseling Activities and Services by School Type and Location

	Hosting visits from college/universities	Assistance with college applications	Organizing tours of colleges/universities	Counseling related to paying for college
All Survey Respondents	80.2%	74.2%	50.3%	43.7%
By City Tier				
Tier 1	88.3	82.5	51.2	50.3
Tier 2	79.3	68.4	55.0	34.2
Tier 3	58.7	60.0	39.0	42.1
By School Type				
Private Aided	68.4	63.8	50.0	36.2
Private Unaided	80.2	71.7	48.1	42.4
International	91.4	89.9	54.7	53.1
Other	70.0	80.0	70.0	55.6

Note: N=370. Shaded cells indicate that no significant differences were found.

⁵ N=370

The survey gathered additional information about the number of college representatives that schools hosted in the most recent academic year—a critical way for counselors to build relationships with institutional representatives and for students to learn about colleges and universities and expand their higher education options. More than two-thirds of all schools surveyed hosted at least one college representative. Schools in tier 1 or tier 2 cities were much more likely to have hosted college representatives, compared with those located in tier 3 cities. International schools also were more likely than other school types to have hosted college representatives.

Schools that Hosted at Least One College Representative

	Percent
All Survey Respondents	68.6
By City Tier	
Tier 1	72.9
Tier 2	69.7
Tier 3	54.0
By School Type	
Private Aided	57.4
Private Unaided	69.1
International	83.1
Other	27.3

Note: N=373

The following table provides more details on the number of representatives from both Indian and international colleges who were hosted by schools. Most schools hosted up to 10 representatives from Indian colleges and up to 20 from international colleges.

Number of College Representatives Hosted by Survey Respondent Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Number of Representatives from Indian Colleges (N=223)		
0-10	149	66.8
11-20	34	15.2
21-30	16	7.2
31-40	9	4.0
41-50	6	2.7
51+	9	4.0
Number of Representatives from International Colleges (N=212)		
0-20	130	61.3
21-40	32	15.1
41-60	17	8.0
61-80	4	1.9
81-100	11	5.2
100+	18	8.5

Interesting differences were found in the number of representatives that schools hosted from colleges outside of India. Schools in tier 1 cities hosted a far larger number of international college representatives compared to schools in other locations.

Number of International College Representatives Hosted by Schools, by City Tier

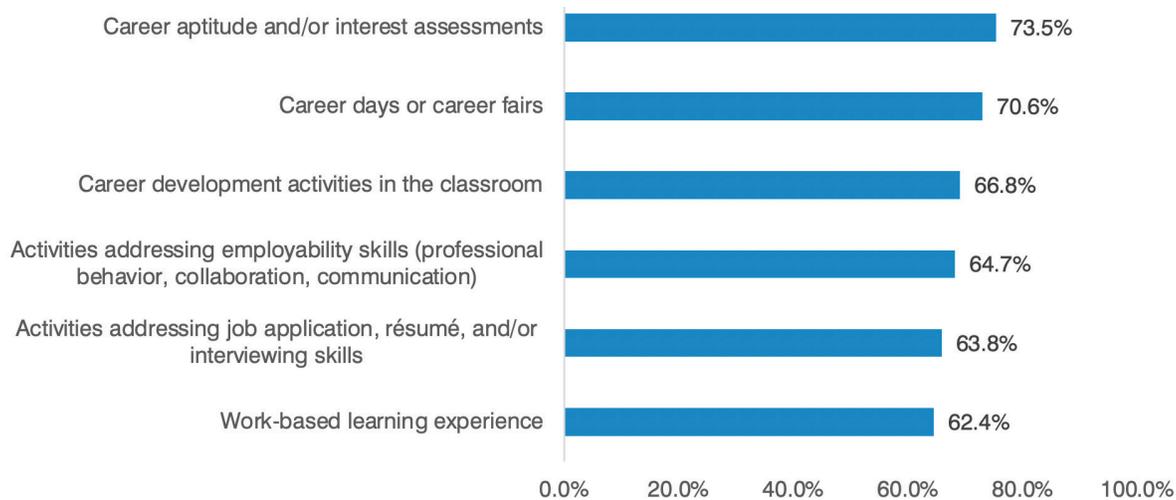
Number of Representatives from International Colleges	Percent of Schools		
	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
0-20	46.2	36.2	17.7
21-40	48.4	38.7	12.9
41-60	76.5	17.6	5.9
61-80	75.0	25.0	0.0
81-100	81.8	9.1	9.1
101+	100.0	0.0	0.0

Note: N=373. Read table as follows: Among schools that hosted 0-20 international representatives, 46 percent were in tier 1 cities, 36 percent were in tier 2, and 18 percent were in tier 3.

Career Counseling Services

The prevalence of various career counseling activities and services are shown in the following figure. Each of the services included in the survey were provided by a majority of respondent schools, with career aptitude/interest being the most common, followed by career days or career fairs.

Career Counseling Activities and Services



Note: N=340

The only differences found based on school characteristics were related to career days or career fairs. Schools in tier 3 cities and private aided schools were much less likely to provide this activity for students compared to their respective counterparts.

Percent of Schools Offering Career Days or Fairs, by School Characteristics

	Career Days or Career Fairs
All Survey Respondents	72.9%
City Tier	
Tier 1	78.6
Tier 2	72.1
Tier 3	55.8
Enrollment Size	
401-800	84.6
801-1,200	84.4
1,201+	50.0
School Type	
Private Aided	55.6
Private Unaided	76.0
International	76.9
Other	83.3

Note: N=340

Survey participants were asked in an open response format to share what resources would enable their schools to offer more robust career and college counseling services. The following major themes emerged from their responses:

	Number	Percent
Online Resource Library	145	43.8
Dedicated Counseling Office	93	28.1
Counseling Toolkit	88	26.6
Dedicated Counselor	34	10.3
Professional Development and Training Opportunities	18	5.4
Visits from Colleges and Employers	18	5.4

Note: N= 331

“The efforts are still not structured over a well-defined framework or curriculum. Would love to explore the possibility of building a focused career curriculum.”

– Survey respondent

Though some respondents indicated that their school is already well-equipped in college counseling, the following major themes about deficits emerged from responses requesting any general comments about career and college counseling in their schools:

- Counseling not taken seriously within the school
- Counseling curriculum is needed
- Counseling program is still developing
- More guidance or training is needed
- Parents need to be more involved

“Career and college counseling has to be taken with more dedication and also with consistency.”

– Survey respondent

Implications for Practice

The results of this joint NACAC-IC3 Institute survey provide valuable insights into the current status of counseling in India’s secondary schools. The findings can guide those interested in expanding, enhancing, or supporting college and career counseling in Indian secondary schools. The results also provide considerations for practitioners, such as recruitment and admission officers, who engage regularly with counselors and teachers to support students in their transitions to postsecondary education and careers.

Creating a Culture of Career and College Counseling

There is a strong college-going culture in India, however, the professionalization of college and career counseling within schools is a newer concept. In order to strengthen career and college counseling:

- **School leadership needs to be involved.** Principals must be engaged as champions of career and college counseling within their schools. Buy-in at the top is critical for fostering a deep culture of career and college counseling within schools.
- **School leaders should serve as mentors to their colleagues at other schools.** By playing an outreach and mentoring role they can encourage other school leaders to adopt a career and college counseling focus in their schools.
- **School leaders and staff must recognize college and career counseling is everyone’s job.** Not all schools are able to have dedicated resources and counselors. Where such resources are lacking, there needs to be greater support for teachers and other personnel who serve the function of counselors. Schools need to embrace the notion that effective counseling is everyone’s job.

- **Start career and college counseling early, but customize the guidance as students advance.** While initiating the counseling function as early as class IX (9th grade) is important, [recent research by the IC3 Institute](#) points to the need for differentiated career and college counseling services according to class level. The needs of pre-college students in class XII (12th grade) are understandably different from those of younger students. Though developed for an American audience, NACAC's [Step by Step resource](#) includes college awareness and planning information for both early and late secondary school students.
- **Work toward lower student-to-counselor ratios.** [Research shows](#) that access to a school counselor can make a significant difference in a student's postsecondary aspirations and their likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education. To realize such results, career and college counselors must operate in an environment free of overwhelmingly large student caseloads.

Support from Higher Education Institutions

Building relationships with secondary schools and fostering connections with counselors or teachers who are directly supporting students can reinforce schools' efforts to provide a culture of career and college counseling. Consider:

- **Offering to lead a workshop for students and families.** Rather than a presentation on your college or university, consider leading a workshop that applies to university admission broadly, addressing topics such as financing higher education or writing a college essay or personal statement.
- **Connecting students with alumni in various fields.** Tap into your alumni network in India to host alumni-student networking sessions. Showcasing various professions, and the academic majors students pursued to get there, can help support the important work of career and college counselors.

Disparities in Counseling Across the Country

India's secondary school sector is large and diverse, including tens of thousands of schools. The hope is that career and college counseling will eventually be available to all students regardless of where their school is located or how it is funded. Our research found significant variability across India in both the availability and adoption of career and college counseling in high schools.

- **Schools in tier 2 and tier 3 cities are not provided the same opportunities to engage in career and college counseling services.** India has a vast number of schools in tier 2 and tier 3 cities that are largely underserved, where counseling is not as well-established or seen as a critical function of the school. The availability of adequate counseling for students is clearly related to the resources available to schools that support career and college counseling. These resources may include: counselor training and guidance workshops and programs; experiential learning opportunities; resource libraries and counseling toolkits; and student fairs and networking opportunities.
- **Support for career and college counseling is growing, but not sufficient.** While some of this need for career and college counseling services is being met by organizations like IC3, which offers a full range of career and counseling activities through the IC3 Institute and other free IC3 convenings, more outreach to high schools by higher education institutions and by industry is needed to ensure that all students—not just those attending relatively well-resourced and urban schools—have access to solid career and college counseling.

Support from Higher Education Institutions

The discrepancy between cities was notably apparent in terms of the number of international universities hosted by schools in tier 2 and tier 3 cities. International universities, particularly in the current virtual recruitment environment, can make efforts to reach these schools and students, with school principals serving as the first point of contact.

Looking Ahead

Our research points to the need for greater resources for developing robust career and college counseling services in Indian high schools. While providing adequate information and resources—such as online resource libraries and a dedicated counseling space—is one part of the solution, adequate training of counselors is critical. Alongside organizations such as the IC3 Institute and NACAC, there is a clear opportunity for governmental bodies or school education boards to play a greater role in providing access to training, information, and resources in the area of career and college counseling, especially given the emphasis on skills training in India's new National Education Policy.

While this research brief provides an important roadmap for career and college counseling in India, additional research could result in a more complete understanding of the status of counseling across India. It is likely that schools with the least capacity for counseling are not represented in the survey respondents due to both difficulties with outreach and limited capacity to respond. Nonetheless, schools, universities, and other stakeholders can use these findings to begin conversations about what school-based career and college counseling should look like, how to define and measure success, and most importantly, how to assess the impact of career and college counseling on students.

Appendix: Methodology

The survey was distributed by email to 4,256 Indian schools in May 2020, and 465 unique responses were received. Forty-one duplicates were removed based on IP addresses. The duplicates appeared to result from respondents restarting the survey rather than continuing. The report provides descriptive statistics for each survey question, including frequency tables and cross tabulations with school or respondent characteristics (e.g., job function, school type, school location, etc.) whenever statistically significant.

Sample Characteristics

Job Function of Respondent

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Counselor	242	52.0
Teacher	115	24.7
Principal	57	12.3
Administrative Staff	11	2.4
Other	40	8.6
TOTAL	465	100.0

Board Affiliation of School

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)	248	55.4
Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE)	36	8.0
State Boards	14	3.1
International Baccalaureate (IB)	67	15.0
International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)	31	6.9
Other	52	11.6
TOTAL	448	100.0

Note: IGCSE was listed as IGSE on the survey.

City Tier where School is Located

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Tier 1	222	49.6
Tier 2	148	33.0
Tier 3	78	17.4
TOTAL	448	100.0

School Type

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Private Aided	74	16.5
Private Unaided	277	61.8
International	80	17.9
Government	4	0.9
Local Bodies	1	0.2
Other	12	2.7
TOTAL	448	100.0

Note: For the analysis, government and local body schools were combined with 'other' because of the low number in these categories.

Number of Students per Counselor at the School

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
0-200	183	41.9
201-400	101	23.1
401-600	69	15.8
601-800	31	7.1
801+	53	12.1
TOTAL	437	100.0